

Moving beyond Quick Assessments, Paperwork, and Flow Charts: RTI Actions that Truly Affect Teaching & Learning in Literacy

Presented at the Illinois Reading Council's
47th Annual Conference
Friday, October 3, 2014
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Description

- **Response to Intervention (RTI)** is a buzz phrase heard throughout many districts. Although most people are talking about it and likely “doing” something about it as well, many schools are simply spending too much time and effort within the areas that are *not* making a noticeable difference in achievement.
- In some schools, there seems to be a heavy focus on some concepts within RTI that are easy to “check off,” while other more complex issues are provided little attention and time. We will sort through the plethora of concepts and terms related to RTI to determine **which ones deserve the most attention within schools**, in order that our struggling students really become better readers and writers!

Welcome!

- **My RTI story...**
 - My first RTI experience - “WOW! This is going to make a difference!”
 - 5 years
 - Focus on LA
 - Few results
- **Essential Question for every RTI component**
 - “Is it making a positive difference for the students?”

Response to Intervention

Purposes:

- To use **assessment data** to **make instructional changes** if students don't respond, in order to determine **what does and doesn't work** for **individual students**.
- To look **more closely at instruction**, rather than placing blame or slapping labels on students when learning doesn't occur.

“Doing RTI Stuff”

- Creating an RTI team.
- Purchasing commercially produced core reading and/or intervention programs.
- Buying screeners and progress monitor assessments, along with their online components.
- Creating a flow chart to illustrate when and how students get “sorted” as they struggle showing which program they “get.”
- Paperwork...lots and lots of paperwork☺

Mistakes Schools Make...

Failure #1:

Failing to focus on Tier I instruction with the time and intensity it deserves.

Core Classroom Instruction Matters!

However, too often schools do the following...

- Choosing to purchase and implement (mandate) a core reading program as the “cure” of poor teaching.
- Focusing on screeners rather than diagnostics (overall, simply using low quality assessments for all students).
- Focus on standardization rather than differentiation.

What schools can do instead...

1. Get into teachers classrooms to uncover the specific areas of need for teachers!

We expect differentiation for our students but fail to provide it for our teachers!

Design high quality PD that focuses on bringing research-based strategies into the classroom and provides a variety of ongoing, on-site support for teachers until they master these.

2. Use data to make decisions about core reading instruction at the teacher level.

- If a teacher is not “broken” then don’t try to fix them!
- Use class-wide data to focus on *teachers* who struggle the most.
- Identify teachers’ areas of need based on data and conversations (reflection).
- Create a culture built around using data to improve instruction.

3. STOP BUYING STUFF!!!!

-Materials don't teach students, teacher do!

-**Intentional Materials Selection** leads to wise spending on specific materials.

-Recognize that there are no “perfect” programs...if you are currently using a program, take this approach instead:

What can we do to make this program even better?

Fidelity is meant to be used within research, not in a classroom situation!

4. Classroom rostering matters!

- Classrooms are sometimes overflowing with struggling students.
- This doesn't set the students or teachers up for success.
- Less than **25-30% of the class** should be students who struggle or are on IEPs.
- This allows for whole group instruction to stay at grade level, while allowing the teacher to work with small groups of students when needed.
- Research shows that **ALL students benefit** from this!

5. Assess Your Tier I Assessments

- Too much focus has been on computerized tests and computer tools to gather and enter data.
- Although it makes data collection easy and efficient - and it produces visually pleasing charts- it usually fails to connect to instructional changes.
- The most important assessments are **ones that drive instruction** – these should be the major focus.
- All too often teachers collect and enter data and the only implication is how students are grouped.

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Assessment Purge

Step 1: Put all assessments on the 'table' that teachers are currently using.

Step 2: For each assessment determine the following:

- WHY do we use it? Is it mandatory (for legislative reasons)? Is it something that has been passed on over the years?
- To which important reading areas does it match (fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, strategies, behaviors, etc)?
- Are the results reliable?
- How do teachers turn the results into teaching changes?
- Are there other assessments that tell use the same thing? Are we over-testing?

Assessment Purge, Cont'd...

Step 3: Determine which assessments should stay because they are:

- Reliable & Valid – examine false positives and negatives
- Serve a specific purpose – mainly they are necessary for instruction
- High quality
- Efficient

Step 4: Create guidelines for the use of the assessment (when, how, why...)

Step 5: Focus on supporting teachers in reading the results and implementing changes to instruction!

Mistakes Schools Make...

Failure #2:

Creating a *Standardized* Tier 2

Every struggling reader is different...

...So why would they all get the same “treatment” in order to help them to succeed?

- **Inefficient model:** only helps *some* students while leaving other students behind.
- **Poor grouping decisions:** often a simple cut score from a screener determines if a student gets placed in an intervention.
- **Missing step:** a diagnostic should follow the screening tool to determine the exact strengths and weaknesses of the reader. ONLY then can decisions be made that match the needs of the reader to an intervention.

Purchased Interventions...

to use or not to use?

- Within Tier 2, many schools purchase one or more commercially produced intervention programs.
- **Evidence based** programs vs. **research based** programs
- The **evidence base** which investigates the effectiveness of these types of programs is not encouraging...

Sources: What Works, Best Evidence Encyclopedia, and Florida Center for Reading Research)

What we know works and doesn't work...

What **DOES** work:

- A **well informed and responsive intervention and/or classroom teacher** of reading.
- Teachers who **collaborate** to bring Tiers 1 and 2 together.
- Having **high quality diagnostic assessments** that inform intervention.

What **DOESN'T** work:

- **Materials DON'T teach children** - research has proven this time and time again!
- Placing high quality materials into the hands of **low quality teachers** doesn't help struggling readers!

Research to Support Non-purchased Interventions

- Many districts purchase programs because they worry “**What would we do without them?**” or “**How will we know what interventionists are doing, and that it is good?**”
- There is **plenty** of research supporting the positive effects of non-purchased intervention.

What do we know about effective, non-purchased interventions?

- Connected to Tier I
- Contains essential components – isn't too narrow.
- Matched to students' needs (assessment)
- Meets a child at their level and progresses them from there.
- It is implemented by a knowledgeable reading expert.
- Responsive and fluid instead of a set of pre-designed lessons.

What *isn't* high quality intervention?

- **Computer based programs** – no evidence to support growth.
- Instruction provided by a **non-teacher**.
- Intervention that **doesn't** include a focus on real reading and writing.
- A heavy focus on completing **worksheets**.
- A **pre-determined set of lessons** designed to “get through” a list of skills.
- Intervention that occurs *during* Tier I instruction – **replacing grade level instruction** instead of adding on more instructional time.
- **Group sizes** larger than three.

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Mistakes Schools Make...

Failure #4:

Making poor decisions based on inappropriate or incomplete assessment data.

Competing Assessments

- Those that the **school psychologist** needs...
 - Standardized
 - Normed
 - Skills oriented due to a focus on quantitative data
- Those that the **interventionist** needs...
 - Specialized
 - Responsive to change over time based on instruction
 - Behavior and strategy oriented
 - Sometimes qualitative

Program “Hopping”

- One reaction to students who aren't being successful = Hopping from one program to another.
- Are **big changes** needed? Was it even a good choice to begin with? How did it match to the students' strengths and weaknesses?
- It is possible that only **small changes** are needed? More direct instruction, beefing up parts, multisensory, different texts, adding texts, more writing, etc.

“Double Dosing”

- Another option when students aren't successful in an intervention: **Time with that specific intervention is increased.**
- If a purchased intervention is a bad match for a student, increasing the time spent in this intervention will not lead to better results!
- Missing more classroom time can make Tier I become very fractured while lowering the impact!

“Biased Assessments”

- **Biased Assessments** - only focus on the actual skills found within the program itself.
- Word-based intervention = word based assessments
- May show a student is getting better at word based skills, with a high possibility of no positive impact on real reading and writing.

Focusing only on Quantitative Data

- Quantitative data **can be easily plotted** on fancy graphs and charts that create a visual display of growth that becomes easy to analyze (they are growing or not growing)
- Often places focus on **only one area**... isn't reading a group of skills and strategies working in unison?
- Numbers could show "growth" on some skills, even when real reading growth is not actually occurring.

***Example of a student reading more WCPM but using poor reading strategies to do so...



A more meaningful way to monitor...

- Student's **behaviors and specific strategies** are also very important when monitoring reading and writing.
- These are rarely measured with single numbers and instead might include a variety of pieces of data that is represented in many ways.
- Can be valuable comments and observations.

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Example:

- A student **skips unknown words** when reading...the child is not confident or knowledgeable in using phonics, PA, and comprehension cues together to make good guesses.
- What type of quantitative, computer-generated assessments can measure progress for this reading skill specifically?
- Often **teacher-created assessment** are the most closely matched to what teachers are actually working on with an individual child, and provide the most feedback to let a teacher know if the child is progressing.

What does progress monitoring data tell us?

- How can progress monitoring data actually be traced back only to intervention?
- Do we truly believe that the rest of the day (outside that 30 minutes) doesn't have an impact?

Reading = Essential Unconstrained Skills

- Although there are many skills that students learn and then don't need to 'relearn' (constrained skills like PA, phonics, alphabetic principle, etc.) there are many IMPORTANT reading skills that are not "learned" and then we move on...they are ongoing (unconstrained).
- When we don't measure them, we often lose focus on them!

Vocabulary, Comprehension, Writing

In closing...

We **KNOW** what can help struggling readers the most:

- To **KNOW** reading = experts!
- To **KNOW** our students - strengths and weaknesses – especially in REAL reading and writing.
- To **KNOW** what is occurring in Tier I so that there is some tie-in and connections.
- To **KNOW** what skills, strategies and behaviors are most essential for reading and writing success.
- To administer assessments that let us **KNOW** exactly what to teach or what program may be appropriate.
- How to observe carefully so we **KNOW** how a students is learning and applying.

The challenge we leave here with today...
is to take what we **KNOW**
and make it happen **NOW** for every child who
struggles!



Resources & Research

A few related articles and research:

- Allington, R.L. (2012). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Anderson, L.W., & Pellicier, L.O. (1990). Synthesis of research on compensatory and remedial education. *Educational Leadership*, 48(1), 10–16.
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- Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N.A.!(2011). *Effective programs for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Data- Driven Reform in Education. doi:10.1016/ j.edurev.2010.07.002
- Allington, R.L. (2011). *What at-risk readers need. Educational Leadership*, 68 (6).